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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002110

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SUBJECT: PEACE ADVISER OUTLINES STATUS OF PEACE TALKS WITH
SEPARATISTS AND INSURGENTS

REF: MANILA 1980 (INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION IN
PEACE TALKS)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Peace Process Adviser Secretary Avelino Razon discussed with the Ambassador October 1 the state of progress in the Philippine government's three main peace processes with separatist and insurgent groups. Talks with the southern Philippines' Muslim separatist group Moro Islamic Liberation Front showed the most progress this year with the signing of a ceasefire agreement, he noted, while talks on fulfilling the terms of the 1996 peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front were delayed by that group's internal rivalries. Peace negotiations with the communist rebels of the National Democratic Front/New Peoples Army showed some progress earlier this year, but were now mired in disagreement about the content of negotiations and the recall of outstanding arrest warrants for rebels. Secretary Razon, while still an active manager of these peace processes, seemed more focused on Manila's relief efforts following Tropical Storm Ondoy and on his upcoming campaign to become the next mayor of Manila. End Summary.

MAKING PROGRESS WITH THE MILF

¶12. (C) In an October 1 conversation with the Ambassador, Peace Process Adviser Secretary Avelino Razon said that the Philippine government made progress this year toward a resumption of peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), as illustrated by the signing of two agreements instituting a ceasefire and endorsed creation of an International Contact Group (ICG) -- and by their combined efforts to support the return of 300,000 internally displaced persons back to their homes. Though optimistic about further progress, he lamented that a final peace agreement in the long term might not bring peace to Mindanao if MILF rogue commanders such as Kato and Bravo decide to splinter off from the main MILF group. Even if that were to happen, the Ambassador reassured, it would still be important for the Philippine government to make gains where possible, building a stronger foundation for more permanent arrangements. The Ambassador said the ICG agreement was a demonstration of substantive progress, and the U.S. looked forward to learning more about it.

MNLF INTERNAL RIVALRY DELAYS TALKS

¶13. (C) Peace talks with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) on implementing the 1996 final peace agreement were not likely to move forward, Razon noted, given the intense rivalry between former and current MNLF chairmen for leadership of the organization. Former MNLF Chairman Nur

Misuari, Razon said, continued to challenge Cotabato City Mayor Muslimin Sema's de facto leadership of the MNLF. Misuari was engaged on a recruitment drive across Mindanao to train new followers and consolidate his strength to prove that he -- not Mayor Sema -- was in control of the group. Post learned separately that Misuari, likely seeking support for his position, held talks in August in Butuan City with a Mindanao tribal government entity to encourage indigenous groups to claim their ancestral lands as "autonomous regions."

TALKS WITH COMMUNIST REBELS SCHEDULED

¶4. (C) Secretary Razon said that talks with leaders of the communist insurgent group National Democratic Front (NDF)/New People's Army (NPA), canceled in August, were being rescheduled for October in Oslo, though he was not optimistic the parties would make substantial progress. NDF Chief Peace Negotiator Luis Jalandoni and exiled leader Jose Maria Sison were serious negotiators, he said, but Benito Tiamzon and his faction were not. Tiamzon's group, in fact, was becoming increasingly rigid in negotiations. Though Tiamzon previously agreed to discuss the "end of hostilities" early on in formal peace talks, he now apparently no longer intended to address the issue at all. The NDF/NPA is seeking a full removal of all warrants of arrest against its personnel, which Razon said the Philippine government -- and the nation's independent judiciary -- could not agree to do. The courts had already released several members from prison for six-month periods as a gesture of good will to help propel talks forward, and the government could not pressure

MANILA 00002110 002 OF 002

the courts to do much more beyond that.

SEEKING THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

¶5. (C) Though still involved in these different peace talks, Razon seemed more focused on his anticipated November 20 declaration of candidacy to run for Mayor of Manila in the May 2010 elections, in which he is expected to compete against his friends incumbent Mayor Alfredo Lim and former Manila Mayor Jose Atienza. Aware that disaster response could become a campaign issue, Razon said he assisted relief efforts in Manila after Tropical Storm Ondoy devastated the city, and thanked the Ambassador for the extensive U.S. support during this crisis. Offering help in a crisis like this one, the Ambassador consoled, is precisely what partnership between friends is all about.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) As Peace Process Adviser since February, when he was pulled out of retirement, Secretary Razon has had little time to cultivate a more influential role for himself within President Arroyo's cabinet. He is one of many senior officials to advise the President on the sensitive political questions surrounding the MILF peace talks, and has been overshadowed by the more pronounced role of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Rafael Seguis, who is directly involved in MILF negotiations. Secretary Razon's leadership qualities -- praised during his two years at the helm of the Philippine National Police -- have been less apparent in his current role. Nonetheless, to Razon's credit, the small but ambitious Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) that he leads has helped to move the Philippine government's three primary peace negotiations further along despite many challenges. OPAPP Undersecretary Nabil Tan, brother of Jolo's Governor Abdusakur Tan, is expected to take charge of OPAPP ad interim after Razon files his candidacy on November 20 to run for Mayor of Manila. Though the large banners in the city with Secretary Razon's smiling face urge citizens to "Support the Peace Process," they are also a clear reminder that Secretary Razon has

already set his sights on the next endeavor.

KENNEY